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FROM THE SAVE KXPOND CAMPAIGN GROUP TO ARGENT LLP

This letter is written by the Save KXPond Campaign Group, a group with a strong desire to see a future for the Kings Cross Pond (“KXPond”). We describe our individual interests at the end of this letter. It is supported by the 4,000 people who have signed a petition to save KXPond and we are canvassing the support of many more local individuals, organisations and businesses around King’s Cross.

This letter is being sent to the partners of Argent LLP (“Argent”), who own the land on which KXPond stands and who are developing the extensive former railway lands at King’s Cross, a project that has been envisioned and in progress for many years.

Background to KXPond and its closure

KXPond was designed as part of the public art programme at King’s Cross, and described as “an art installation you can swim in”. It is a fresh water pool, filtered by plants, the first such pool open to the public in the UK. It offers a unique experience of swimming as if in nature, but surrounded by the activities of a construction site in the heart of a great city, and with the safety of a lifeguard present. It opened in May 2015. Argent has recently announced its closure on 26 October 2016.

We know that it was always Argent’s intention that KXPond would be temporary, and that it only has temporary planning permission. That permission expires on 31 January 2017, after which Argent is committed by an agreement with the local planning authority, the London Borough of Camden (“Camden”) to add the site of KXPond to the area of the existing Lewis Cubitt Park, which it adjoins.

Argent itself acknowledges that KXPond “has become a much-loved part of King’s Cross”. It has welcomed well over 20,000 swimmers in the 18 months it has been open. Many photographs and videos published on social media, and hundreds of comments added to the Save KXPond petition illustrate how very attractive and distinctive it is and just how much how many people have come to love it. Many of these people have visited it repeatedly, as a place of recreation and relaxation, not simply as an art installation to experience once as a novelty.

What we would like to achieve

The KXPond Campaign Group believe that opening KXPond was a visionary step by Argent, for which it should be praised, but that closing it would be a short-sighted one that would represent a great loss of amenity to King's Cross as a whole.

We would like Argent to seek Camden's permission to keep KXPond open or at least not to remove it, initially for a short period beyond its announced closing date of 26 October 2016, so that:

- **Argent and Camden can fully consult people who live in the area and people who visit the amenities of King's Cross about their views, and ask them whether they would like to keep KXPond, or if they would prefer to have the area included in Lewis Cubitt Park as originally planned, and**
- **The KXPond Campaign Group can explore possibilities for fund-raising to help meet the costs of establishing and maintaining KXPond on a more permanent basis.**

We would welcome a face-to-face discussion with Argent's partners and Project Director and an opportunity to present and discuss our case more fully.

Why we would like Argent to listen to us and think again

Making places for people - consultation

- Argent describes itself as a property developer that "makes places for people". KXPond is a small part of a huge project to redevelop and regenerate the King's Cross Railway Lands, with many attractions and amenities already established. Outline planning permission for parts of this work which included the land on which the pond stands was obtained as long ago as 2004. Temporary planning permission for KXPond itself was obtained in 2014. It's clear from the terms of that planning permission that one reason it is temporary is that Camden want to "properly consider" the long-term use of the site in accordance with the 2004 outline planning permission for King's Cross.
- Camden consulted local residents about the 2014 planning application before KXPond was built, but only had a few responses. We recognise that neither Argent nor Camden have any obligation to consult anyone about the decision to close KXPond, because Argent is not a public authority, and as far as Camden is concerned, closure simply follows from the expiry of a temporary permission. But the petition to save KXPond has gathered 4,000 signatures in a few weeks, many with strongly supportive comments from local residents and regular users of KXPond. Neither Argent nor Camden have consulted the "people" for whom Argent "make places" now that KXPond has actually been in existence and so many people have experienced it. We think Argent and Camden should now ask people with an interest in the public amenities of King's Cross whether they would actually prefer the land to be added to Lewis Cubitt Park, or to continue to be used for KXPond. Quite apart from supportive comments, on the warm weekday afternoons of the first few days of October it has been noticeable that there have been as many people swimming in KXPond as use the park.

Pleasures and health benefits of outdoor swimming

- The pleasures and benefits to health of outdoor swimming, and particularly of swimming in natural unheated water, have gained increasing prominence and popularity in recent years. They were strongly featured in the recent TV series "The Doctor Who Gave Up Drugs", created by Dr Chris van Tulleken, who is himself a regular KXPond swimmer and a member of the Campaign Group. This recent growth in popularity would not have been reflected in any public consultation carried out in 2004 or at any other time until very recently.

#LondonIsOpen

- Glimpses of KXPond were included in a video made by the office of the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, in support of his post-EU referendum #LondonIsOpen campaign. It would be a sad irony if a place that featured in that campaign were now to be closed.

Growing a community – and a new generation

- KXPond has helped to develop a strong sense of community in a newly created area of London. One member of the Campaign Group is a regular swimmer who lives in an adjacent block of flats and who has seen for himself how successful community days at KXPond have been. Many users have commented on the friendly atmosphere of KXPond, and that it is popular with people of all ages, from families with very small children to adults well beyond retirement age. At least one family who have just had another baby would like that child to get to know and enjoy KXPond as their older children have done.

Bringing the public to King's Cross

- KXPond is part of the development of King's Cross as a whole. Its planning permission restricts consumption of food and drink around the pond (to avoid risk of water contamination), but as a consequence people who visit KXPond also tend to visit the bars, restaurants and shops nearby and become aware of other activities around King's Cross. In addition to the many local people who use KXPond regularly, many who are interested in outdoor swimming have travelled from around the UK and abroad to visit it.

Urban swimming in nature in other cities

- KXPond is the first public project in the UK promoting urban swimming in nature, but not the first in Europe, where other cities, particularly in Scandinavia, Switzerland and Germany, show how successful a permanent urban swimming site can be. For example, Sørenga in Oslo is a prominent city centre waterfront development with apartment buildings, bars, and restaurants very similar in style and atmosphere to King's Cross, but with a large and popular seawater pool complex as a permanent feature. Our petition to save KXPond is being supported by a French group: Baignades Urbaines, which supports similar ventures in French cities.

The not-so-temporary temporary

- There are well-established precedents for temporary structures that have become so well loved that they have been made permanent: the London Eye and the Eiffel Tower being two very well known examples.

Future financing and funding

- We understand that Argent will not have planned for a continuing financial commitment to KXPond. We cannot realistically expect or attempt to persuade corporate, benevolent, or crowd-funding sponsors to make committed decisions in the space of a few weeks between announcement and closure, or without any sense of future planning consent for the project. Keeping KXPond for a few more months would enable the Campaign Group to explore these possibilities more fully. The Campaign Group is very aware of Camden's requirement for accessible public amenity for the land, and would like to work on a financial model that enabled subsidy of use of KXPond by people on low incomes, perhaps partially through the cost of season tickets purchased by regular users. Those of us who are regular swimmers at KXPond know that the announcement of its closure has in fact raised its profile, with many visitors commenting that they had not previously heard of it, and others travelling significant distances to experience it before it closes. We believe that there is potential for making it better known and used closer to its capacity if it does have greater permanence, especially with the ever-increasing density of occupation of King's Cross as a whole.

We hope you will read this letter as expressing the views of the many people who feel that creating KXPond is one of the best things that Argent has done at King's Cross, who hope that a future can be found for it and who are asking you to pause and explore this possibility before taking the irrevocable step of demolishing it.

We look forward to hearing from you.

[signatories on next page]

Members of the Save KXPond Campaign Group

Barbara Rich

I have lived in Islington since 1982 and have followed the progress of plans for development of the King's Cross Railway Lands with keen interest since the mid-1980s. I visit King's Cross very frequently to walk, shop, eat out, visit exhibitions and events or attend performances at Kings Place, and have been swimming at KXPond many times, probably well over 100, and have introduced several friends to it. I feel an enormous sense of loss at its impending closure.

Dr Christoffer van Tulleken

I live locally and work as an academic at UCL with collaborations at the Crick. I also present a wide range of programs for the BBC about health and medicine. In a recent program on BBC1 "The Doctor Who Gave Up Drugs" I reported on recent research about the benefits of swimming and in particular swimming outdoors in cold water. These include both physical and psychological health improvements. I use the pond personally with members of my family but I also have a group who use it as a way of managing various psychological problems including depression. I think that the benefits of the pond are so wide ranging in terms of the health of both the users and the area that to dismantle it would be a tragedy. It is the most unique piece of art in London and I thank Argent for bringing it to life and ask that they continue to support it whilst a proper consultation can take place.

Sally Goble

I am an avid swimmer, and speak and write regularly about swimming - including for the Guardian's swimming section. I live and work in Islington and work a stone's throw from the Kings Cross Pond. When the pond opened in early 2015 I formed a group of colleagues from the Guardian's offices to begin winter swimming at the pond. This winter swimming group has loved swimming every Tuesday lunchtime at the pond: one colleague who left working locally still travels back every Tuesday from Camden to swim with us there. The pond forms a social focus for many people who experience it. It draws us in.

Bryn Dymott

I have been an open water swimmer for ten years and exclusively outdoors since March this year. The opportunity to swim in the Kings Cross Pond, an art installation with freedom and the environment at its core, whilst surrounded by construction and rejuvenation, is exciting and worth saving for both Londoners and visitors. The pond provides a clean, safe and invaluable swim location.

Imogen Radford

I am an all year outdoor swimmer. I lived in Kings Cross in the 1980s, and I am amazed to see its transformation. The pond drew me back to enjoy the area, and I see it as an oasis in the lively urban scene. I started the petition to save it as I feel that its loss would be such a shame.

Ben Williams

I am resident on the NIC estate having moved to the area in March 2013. In this time I have come to greatly admire the work Argent are undertaking to create a unique place to live, work and play in the heart of London. Working together with a brilliant group of neighbours, we as residents are attempting to build a special community to the north of the development. With some success: setting up a tenants and residents association, a neighbourhood watch and organising regular community days & social gatherings for residents on a shared roof terrace, in the Skip Garden and in the Kings Cross Pond. These community events have done more than anything else to create a sense of place and ensure that more often than not all residents have close friends across the development and know the majority of their neighbours. The pond has been a major part of bringing all ages and cultures together and I believe its use by the community will grow considerably as the NIC site becomes more populated. On a personal level, I love the pond (swimming on a regular basis) and really believe that it is a superb use of the NIC public realm.

Stephen and Jo Richards

We live locally with our three children, the youngest born in the first week of October 2016. Our two older children love the pond, and do not want to swim anywhere else, and we would love to be able to introduce the youngest to it as well. We have been there many times with friends and their children, and Stephen has swum year-round with a group of friends over the last 13 months.